AMERICAN COMMONWEALTHS. AMERICAN COMMONWEALTHS. Edited by Horace E Scudder. Virginia: A Historyjot the People. By John E-Ten Cooke. 16mo, pp. xxi., 523. Hougaton, Minita & Co.

The scheme of the new series of volumes just un-dertaken by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. in a style similar to that of the "American Statesmen" and "American Men of Letters," covers not only a history of separate States, but a description of the foundation and development of those members of the Union which have exercised a controlling in-fluence upon the American political system. "The Commonwealth" is properly regarded in this plan as "a positive force in American history," and in describing it the authors will be expected to treat of the character and circumstances of the people who formed it, the principles of government which prevailed among them, and the incidents which affected their political theories. The idea of the series is excellent; and if the contributors succeed in carrying out the editor's programme we shall have a valuable addition to our historical libraries. Virginta is well chosen to lead the set. It was the first and greatest of the colonies. It divides with New-England the chief share in the making of the Nation. It possessed, from an early period, a firmly ordered system of society and followed a distinct line of politics. The history of the province and the colony presents unusual attractions to the reader; it is the most pictureque in our annals, the most crowded with memorable figures and dramatic events; on the banks of the James and the shores of the Chesapeake we must look for the true romance of the forest.

Mr. John Esten Cooke has at least one eminent qualification for writing this story; he is a Virginian with an ardent love for his State, an acquaintance with its historical places, and a familiarity with its old records. His ample knowledge of localities gives a certain distinctness to pertions of his narrative which we miss in graver histories. He has been a careful and enthusiastic student of the strange life of the Cavalier planters, who kept such costly state in the midst of the wilderness, and were pioneers and aristocrats at the same time. And he has not failed to show how it was that these territorial lords were at once the most loyal of Englishmen and the most rebellious of Americans. In colony which clang the most fondly to class distinctions, to privilege, to titles, to royalty, the Revolution found its firm support. The most illustrious patriots of the Democratic revolt belonged to the same Cavalier element whose fidelity to the Crown had earned for Virginia the title of the Old Dominion. This is the problem of the Virginia common wealth. Mr. Cooke makes the explanation quite plain. The Virginia planters from the first were less observant of the King's rights than tenamous of their own. Our author, with the amiable pride of the descendant of a race of gallant gentlemen, is inclined, we think, to exaggerate the importance of some of the incidents cited as illustrations of the early spirit of independence. Of the petition of the Virginia Assembly in 1619 to the Virginia Company in London for au-thority "to allow or disallow of their orders of court, as his Majesty hath given them power to allow or disallow our laws," Mr. Cooke says that "this was the great original American claim of right—the authority to govern themselves," and that Patrick Henry's protest against the Stamp Act, a century and a half afterward, was only a repetition of it. This is an obvious mistake: the petition asserted no right; in praying for a privilege it tacitly admitted that no right existed. Again, Mr. Cooke's long account of Bacon's rebellion does not substantiate his contention that this somewhat obscure affair was a popular insurrection to correct misgovernment. Nevertheless, he does exhibit the uniform tendency of Virginia politics toward the antional of popular rights; and it is quite true, as he says, that, "if socially aristocratic, the small society is politically republican. The ancient usage holds that all freemen's shall have a voice in elections. The Virginians recognize the great truth that the gold lace is only the guinea stamp—the manhood of the free citizen is the real gold." "The Virginians have been described as 'aristocrats and slaves of Church and King'; but the aristocrats were among the first to proclaim that 'ail men are created equal'; the bigots overthrew their Church; and the slaves of the King first cast off his authority, de-clared Virginia au independent Commonwealth,

and were foremost in establishing a republic. Mr. Cooke sees that a detailed picture of the people of Virginia, their character, customs, education, employments and morals, is essential to an understanding of these anomalies, and he has made it the chief part of his book, He is mis taken, however, in thinking that the picture has "never been painted." It has been very well painted, and that recently, and we cannot honestly say that he has added much to the portrait. This is a case in which we are in doubt whether the picture would have been better if the artist had taken more pains or if he had taken less. He has apparently labored with the effort to be light and vivacious; if he had been simple he would have been much more entertaining. The movement of his story is hampered by his extraordinary prolixity-not mere diffuseness, but a habit of repetitionand it is weakened by a license which he carries to a greater length than any other writer of English whom we now recall, namely, the use of the present tense in historical narrative. This rhetorical device, which is popular with the French but agrees ill with the genius of English composition, is never admissible except when the narrative derives impetuosity both from the exciting character of the facts with which it deals, and the sustained rapidity of the style; and even then it must be used with great reserve; most judicious writers at the present day will not use it ai all. With Mr. Cooke, however, it is so common, and is applied so freely in ordinary, leisurely, unimpassioned writing, that it becomes a principal characteristic of his style. Here are two random

For about ten years now the colony goes on its way in a hundrum fashion, passing laws for the regulation of its internal affairs. The King's pardon is not to extend to such persons as plant tobacco contrary to the Virginia statute (1661). In each county are to be built houses for "educating poor children in the knowledge of spinning, weaving and other useful occupations (1668)," etc.

Virginia remains quiet and prosperous in spite of the furious conflict in England. Hearts burn, no doubt, when those ships from London and Bristol bring tidings of the great wiestle between King and Parliament which is yet doubtful. But the King's strength is plantly failing, and the Virginia royalists go about with hanging heads, sad at heart; and the heads of the other faction, who sympathize with the Parliament, begin to rise joyfully. The times are gloomy for the old Cavaliers of the King; above all for Sir William Berkeley, etc.

Let any reader substitute the past for the present tense in these extracts, and see how much force directness and speed the narrative gains by the

As the story approaches our own times the author shows his attachment to the old States-rights fallacies which have involved our country in so many woes, and his work becomes extremely unsatisfactory. We must give him credit for a leyal endeavor to avoid offence; but it is not in the nature of things that a man brought up in the old Virginia traditions should quite understand the sentiment of Nationality which, already a controlling force in our politics, will be cherished in the next generation by all American parties. One of Mr. Scudder's difficulties in conducting this series of histories will arise from the relations of the commonwealths of the Nation; but Mr. Cooke's genteel defence of the sovereignty theories of Virginia will do no great harm.

Our author is not strong in the critical faculty, which is such an important part of the equipment of a historian. It is because he does not distinguish between the real purposes of the Virginia adventurers and the pious manner of speech observed in their charter, as in all such documents of that time, that he assigns the conversion of the Indians as one of the chief motives of the emigration, the fact being of course that the first Virginians cared about as much for the souls of the Indians as did the Forty-niners of California, and that traces of any missionary efforts will be sought in vain in their annals. In reviewing the few works written in Reopens Wednesday, Sept. 26. For circulars, &c., applyat the school, or to Prof. BENRY DRISLER 48 West 40th, and 6th avea, roopens Tuesday, September 18. as much for the souls of the Indians as did the

Virgium, by Captain John Smith and others, curing the Plantation period, he ventures the astonishing opinion that they possess "a virile and sinewy force which entitles them to rank with the best English literature produced during the seventeenth century"—the century of "Hamlet" and "King Lear," and "Paradise Lost," of Bacon, of Ben Jonson, or Be of Beaumont and Fletcher, and John Dry-den. He accepts the Pocahontas legend not only with absolute confidence but with a strong feeling of irritation at the modern writers who have questioned it; and yet, when we come to weigh his remarks upon the controversy we cannot see that he has really argued the case at all. One of the strongest points against the story of the dramatic rescue of Captain Smith by the Indian girl, is that Smith does not mention it in his original account of his Virginia adventures, the "True Relation," but it appears for the first time in his "General History," published sixteen years after the "True Relation." The inference is obvious that it was a literary embellishment; and there are many circumstances to confirm this supposition. Mr. Cooke, however, treats the difficulty cavalierly. He assumes, upon no authority whatever, that the Pocahontas story was told in the "True Relation," but was cut out by the editor. "The statement of the London editor is: 'Something more was by him written, which, being as I thought fit to be private, I would not adventure to make it public.' There is little doubt that the omitted portions referred to Smith's adventures on the Chickahominy and York, and that the editor struck them out in order not to discourage colonization." Mr. Cooke candidly adds that "this is purely conjecture." Satisfied, however, that he has overthrown his adversaries by a conjecture, he concludes that "general history" has been "in no degree discredited," and that "Smith's character has not suffered, except in the estimation of a few critics who seem to feel a personal enmity towards bim." We hope that Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, at whom this allusion is evidently aimed, will let us know when he had his quarrel with Captain John Smith, and what was the cause of the falling-out.

EMERSON ON EDWARD EVERETT.

From Historic Notes of Life and Letters in Massachusetts in The Allandic.

There was an inference on the young people from the genius of Everett when the young people from the genius of Everett when the Honor and the young people from the genius of Everett will most too that of Perfeles it to that of Perfeles it to the young the world when the master of elegance. If any of my reader we all the period in Boston or Cambridge, they will easily remember his radiant beauty of person of a classic style; his heady large eye, marbid his perfect of the high the so this form needed; seniptured lips: a vice of such rich tones, such precise and perfect atterance, that, aithough sightly masal, it was the most meliow and beautiful and correct of all the mistuments of the time. The word that he spoke, in the manner in which he spoke it, became current and classical in New-England. He had great taken too collecting facts, and for bringing those he had to bear with ingenious felicity on the topic of the moment. Let him rise to speak on what occasion soever, a fact had always just transpired when composed, with some other fact well known to the audience, the most pregnant and happy coincidence, it was remarked that for a man who threw out so many facts he was seldom conviced of a blunder. He had a good ceal of special learning, and all was available for purposes of the hour. It was all new learning, that wonderfully took and stimulated the young men. It was so colidy and weightily communicated from so commanding a platform—as if in the consciousness and consideration of all history and all learning—adorned with so very simple and austere beauties of expression, and enriched with so many excellent digression and significant quotations that, though nothing could be conceived beforehand less attractive indeed less life for reven beys from Cott increased were well as the property of the manner, and over the own of the manner, on the orphical world of the honor of the manner and even those has a decreased to himself and his solid and

and glitter.

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